761 "Koroya do, it is old age," but let us allow them to finish their sentences and continue their thoughts "a ko toun kadi Komo yé, he was beloved by the Komo," -- "à ko toun kadi Kono yé, Nama yé, Douga ye, he was beloved by the Kono, the Nama, the Douga," etc.

761 When people pass by holding a rooster or hen by the feet one
782 may wonder where they are going; if one follows, one finds that they
776 are going to the temple of a fetish, there to sacrifice and to redden their god with blood. "A toun koromé Alla sérà à ma, he was old and God came to him," is an expression which is rarely on Bambara lips. When it is heard, it is used with a very special meaning; it signifies that the old man in question was a good man, beloved by all, even by God, but by no means that God killed him. The sacrifices made on this occasion clearly demonstrate this, for they are all directed to a fetish. If God alone were the cause and not the fetishes, the family of the deceased would refrain from all sacrifice; at the very most, it would offer a saraka by order of a sorcerer, but even the saraka offered to God -- and they are offered to Him -- is not a sacrifice, as we shall see later.

761 The priests of a djiné fetish and the owners and priests of a boli
778 fetish have the consolation that they always fall under the blows of the genie which they hold and to which they sacrifice. As for other mortals, 80 times out of 100, and one might say even more without exaggerating, they are killed by a boli fetish. The Komo, Kono, Nia, Nama, and Douga fetishes etc., are the chief murderers, and entire villages are often decimated by them.

761 Although they are able to deliver blows on their own initiative,
578 they are often only intermediaries, the agents of a depraved will to
674 which they have offered their services; almost always there is either a thrown poison, korti, or a poison that is poured, dounkono. Thus
754 sorcerors are consulted at every death; one is sought through their mediation. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is the great maxim for the Bambara as for the Jews, and vengeance must be taken on the one who was able to win over the good graces of a fetish and force it to bring suffering or mourning into the bosom of a family. This vengeance is obtained through the intermediary of a fetish, and

761 therefore secretly, and good relations between the actual /50/ or sup-
518 posed culprit and the unfortunate family are not broken in anyway.
● 674 The strange fact that has always surprised me is that all these people
754 converse amicably, do each other small favors, invite each other to drink and eat, while in their hatred they maintain a constant guard. They watch each other as they smile -- one party to protect their lives and their interests, the other to obtain vengeance. And on the day when it is least expected, that vengeance explodes inexorably. Cases of poisoning are not unusual in the Sudan, and it is not without reason that almost every death is blamed on the korti and the dounkono. I know that many die a perfectly natural death, and I have seen dropsy brought on by syphilitic consumption stupidly attributed to poisoning by the Komo, acute peritonitis to poisoning by the Kono, dysentery to poisoning by the Nama, undue swelling of the testicles with purulent abscesses, which were consequences of misconduct, to poisoning by the Nia, an abscess in the bladder to the Douga or the Nama. But it is a definite fact which I have noted many times in the course of seven years, and which any European living among the Negores can observe, however little he knows the language, the diseases which kills the natives is contracted when they return from a market, from a festival in honor of a fetish, or from a drinking bout where d'lo flows freely. The person's kidneys are hard and painful, his stomach causes him horrible suffering, his intestines seem to be torn by thorns, and there is complete anuria. In three or four days at the most his time is up.

The administrators at the head of a circle have all had to settle these cases which touch on the question of poisoning, and I doubt if there is one who has seen the matter clearly, so difficult it is to establish poisoning by korti and by dounkono. Let us refrain from throwing a stone at them; in a similar situation we would all be at a loss, for here there are always as many guilty persons as there are innocent, and all of them deserve the rope even while able openly to claim peace, liberty, and life. Since in the eyes of the Negro the fetish alone is guilty, there is a very simple means of stopping the decimation of the population and of allowing it to grow!

000 I pass over and do not dare to give this means: it is too radical, especially in our era; it is not anticlerical; it lacks breadth /51/ of mind. The fetish trees would have to be cut and burned, the boli confiscated, and their priests and owners employed in colonial works. Nor should the sorcerers be forgotten -- these men who spend their lives cheating people and stealing from them, who know only one kind of cultivation, the cultivation of laziness; finally, many schools would have to be opened. Paganism and barbarism would soon come to an end. The missionaries are there, ready to devote themselves, and they would ask no sacrifice from the treasury of the colony to do so; but the missionary has a morality which is too elevated, too noble, to be given to savages.... With what, then, is paganism to be replaced? With Islamism no doubt! Islam soils everything it touches, it abases a man more than it raises him. It is better to let the Negro redden the trees of his bush with blood, for he would gain nothing by the change. Every médersa (1), even that of djenné, is useless,

1. A médersa is an Arab school.

nonsensical, and absurd; Arabic is not spoken in the Sudan, so what good is it to give the natives a language which is neither theirs nor French? Why should we want Islam in the Sudan? The villages are happy, full of zest; let us not try to make them sad and silent, let us not make them Arab villages, where one finds a human lizard on the street corner, lazily hidden in his burnoose and a hoarse dog barking on the walls, and where all the gates are shut. These Arab villages give the feeling of a prison, the chill of the tomb, and there is no liberty there except for vermin and lice.

754 If it is difficult to ascertain a poisoning by korti and by dounkona, ●674 here is the reason. When a Negro wants to take revenge, he goes to find a sorcerer to whom he confides his plan and gives his reasons. He is more interested in seeing his enemy suffer than in seeing him dead, and if he succeeds in injuring him and his family, harming his body and his possessions, he declares himself satisfied.

Sometimes the sorcerer undertakes the task, but he is cautious, knows how to contrive matters to suit the occasion. He can assume

754 all functions to some degree, and it is to his own advantage to be con-
674 tent, in such an instance, with the position of solicitor; to whoever
/52/ consults him, he indicates a celebrated fetish in the hands of one of his friends. The Bambara runs there without delay, and the master of the fetish, generously and heavily paid, takes the god out of its dirty goatskin. Onto one of its instruments (for a boli is manifold, and
[778] horns of cattle and antelopes, varnished with blood and brownish in color, are mingled with other objects in the shape of an eggplant, a turnip, a beetroot, a napkin ring, horse dung, etc., etc.), onto the sirikoun, which is almost always wrapped in a red shirt front, he ties firmly with a cotton thread seven straws five to seven centimeters long. The petitioner explains his visit, names the enemy on whom he wants to take vengeance, gives the reasons that compel him, and the master of the fetish recites his formulas, reddens his sirikoun with blood, and plasters onto its sides some spittle containing chewed kola nut.

754 If the sacrificial hen dies with spread wings and breast on the
674 ground and if when split in half the kola nut falls with the pulp down
787 and the round side up, the contemplated revenge is put off until later, for it is believed that the sacrifice has not been accepted. Our Bambara then goes away, relieved of a hen, two kola nuts, and at least 160 cauri, but nowise defeated; eight or ten days later he returns to the charge, unless he is too impatient to wait and consults a new sorcerer, who gives him orders to appeal to a fetish that shows a greater interest and has a more enterprising and less timid disposition.

If the hen dies on its side or on its back with its feet in the air, and if the pieces of kola nut fall on the round side with the pulp on top, the sacrifice is accepted, and this is the god's answer to the effect that he is taking his client's side. The enemy is thenceforth
754 placed under the boli a blara boli koro, the sanctioned expression;
674 he is placed under the avenging power of the fetish and is in its hands,
278 and the master of the idol, the sacrificer, and the people in his retinue plot to make him disappear at once. They undertake the task themselves as seldom as possible, however; they prescribe sacrifices and offerings to the client and give him a deer horn carefully tied up, telling him how to use it. This deer horn is nothing less than a horn

754 of poison, and the brown powder concealed in it is usually Strophanthus
●674 seed /53/ crushed and kneaded into excreta of human corpses and
278 saliva taken from their mouths. This mixture is dried in the shade and then wrapped in a piece of hyena intestine, and to render the effects more immediate and certain, the fetish is brought out and placed on this meal and a sacrifice made. These sacrosanct preparations are made at night, if possible in the first quarter of the moon, and never on a Monday or Thursday, which are days of rest for the boli gods (1).

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1. The boli have two days' leave per week, and the Negroes also take this rest. However, they are broad-minded on this point even though for certain labors they ask the religious chief or a sorcerer to be allowed to work. As a rule a boli may not go out Sunday or Monday night nor on Wednesday or Thursday. They quite often do go out, however, but only by command of the fetish or a sorcerer. To bring out a fetish is to spend the night dancing the dance of the fetish, and when the initiates want to dance they always manage to do so. The boli are also sacrificed to on Monday and Thursday even though they are at rest. In theory there is rest for the fetishes; actually, the idea is loosely applied.

754 To succeed and to keep from displeasing the fetish, who would
674 then abandon your cause and turn against you, you must follow the prescriptions of the priest and members of his council to the letter; the omission of one rite, one sign, one formula, one imprecation, destroys the power of the poison contained in the horn, or at least renders it ineffective. Sometimes this powder is thrown and is called korti sou, and at other times it is poured and is called dounkono di.

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674 The dounkono is administered or poured by sliding a pinch of it under the nail of the middle finger of the left hand and throwing it with a skillfully concealed flick into the food or drink of the enemy. Food sauce, dégé (millet flour mixed with water), millet beer (d'lo), and di kolé (hydromel) are suitable and without doubt easily poisoned.

Throwing poison, korti sou, remains the prerogative of the sorcerers, priests, and masters of the fetishes, and one must be somebody in order to use it (2). As with the dounkono, a pinch is slid

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2. There are many old Bambara who, after a meal with a neighbor or friend, mutter a prayer while washing their hands and make the motion of throwing korti poison. This is a curse which they throw against the enemies of the family that has received them.

under /54/ the nail of the middle finger, and with a strong flick it is thrown onto the enemy or merely toward him or onto an object which has belonged to him, and it is ordered to be effective, to kill him if possible, or at least to reward him with a sickness which he will long remember.

The Bambara fear the korti far more than the dounkono and if an enemy seriously threatens him with it they tremble. For a person so threatened is no longer dealing with a man, a power equal to his own; he must be on guard against an all-powerful god who places his strength and power at the service of the man. The force is submissive and obedient, triumphant and vengeful; it delivers its blows blindly where it is ordered and onto any person against whom it is aroused and against whom it is hurled. That, in my opinion, is the exact translation of the expression, korti sou ma la. As a dog is set on a person (oulou sou ma la), so korti poison is thrown at him (korti sou ma la).

The Negroes say that korti has a crushing effect: when it strikes you, you feel a violent upheaval throughout your body, your limbs stiffen, and you fall backward. You may die of the attack, but

754 usually you come back to life and get off with a fainting spell followed
674 by violent hiccups and vomiting (1). For several days afterwards, and

1. Were I not afraid of provoking a smile, I would admit that in February, 1908, having gone to a Da woro, a celebration which takes place six days after circumcision, I was called by the master of the Komo and, when we were alone, he threw korti at me with the usual curses and left. Without doubt emotion as well as the fatigue of the journey and of the previous day had much to do with my reaction, but I immediately felt stomach cramps and held onto the wall so as not to fall. My discomfort lasted from five to ten minutes.

sometimes several months, a malignant fever confines you to your mat, your limbs swell, deep and purulent sores cut into your body, and so you will drag on for months and months, incurable, and a burden to everyone and to yourself.

The korti sometimes strikes you in such an unobtrusive way that you do not feel it entering. You notice it later when sickness comes, and its nature is declared by the sorcerer, that infallible being who is never mistaken. /55/

754 The Negro is almost without defense against the korti. A person
755 poisoned by it must have recourse to a more powerful fetish, and he kills hens and goats in vain, for he seldom finds one. He covers himself with grigris, surrounds himself with talismans, and nothing does any good. Even the two little deer horns hung around his neck remain ineffectual and unable to defend him, holy as may be the powder they contain.

754 Against the dounkono, or poison that is poured into food and
674 drink, a victim not only has recourse to his gods and his grigris, which

754 become detached and fall of their own accord "if they are well made
674 and have lost none of their complete power"; he also has a mass of antidotes. Almost always he escapes with nothing more than a few days on his mat and a good stomach-ache, and although his convalescence may be long and can sometimes go on indefintely, at least he is shown sympathy; he gets a big share in the sacrifices offered by his friends, and his broth improves.

754 If the korti are many and cannot be numbered -- "each fetish
278 has its own" -- the dounkono are still more numerous, for in addition to the fetishes, the sorcerers, elders, men, and women, all know how to prepare a poison and give it whatever strength and power is desired. Every poison produces a special disorder in the body depending on the hand that throws or pours it. When in doubt, the Bambara consult the being who never deceives and cannot be mistaken: the sorcerer! And it is usually he who prescribes the antidote.

754 In the eyes of the Bambara, pouring poison (dounkono di) or
673 throwing it (korti sou) is a blameworthy act, and those who are guilty of it have a dismal reputation among their fellows. One should not be surprised to see this crime remain unpunished, however, for in their eyes it does not bear the same odium as an overt or concealed murder by main force. I might even say, without fear of error, that this way of taking revenge is for them not a crime in the strict sense of the word. They so often have recourse to fetishes to settle a dispute and so readily threaten an enemy with the wrath of the gods, that taking vengeance through their intermediary leaves them calm and without any remorse. Besides, with what reproach should we reproach one who does so? It is true that he is cruel and without pity, /56/ but who gives power to the powder that he pours and the powder that he throws? It is the god, the fetish, and it alone is guilty! So let the enemy obtain the fetish's good graces and ward off its blows by sacrificing, let him set a more powerful god against it.

761 As one can see to the Bambara there is nothing natural about
753 physical and mental suffering and death; there is always an intermediary, and suffering and death are caused by an enemy who is taking vengeance, by a wicked person, by a sorcerer, or by a fetish.

181 me, and it seems to me that the Bambara might describe himself as: "A man sufficiently master of himself to be able always to agree with you without ever revealing his inner thoughts."

Their character is not made up entirely of vices, however, and I have been told by earnest men that the Bambara never, at least in public, practice those familiarities with women which shock and wound every person of high principles. They have added that the two [674] crimes of adultery and fornication are unusual with them, and this, one may be sure, is less on account of the severe penalties which they incur (it seems that before the French conquest the punishment was death without reprieve), than because they are without feelings, that 181 is, strong passions. Their women can without any difficulty go around 291 with bare bosoms, breasts exposed, hips girded with a paltry rag knotted under the navel, and their young girls are satisfied with their small strip of cloth, three fingers wide, which is knotted in front at the waist, slides between the legs, and is caught up in back by the cord, to fall in a long train decorated by a gorgeous pompon the size of a fist. They did not tell me, of course, but /158/ they gave me to understand quite well that if it were absolutely necessary the girls could without blushing go around in the scant garb of children who roll in the dust dressed as on the day they were born, quite naked. Nakedness cannot stir a Negro; beauty does not excite his eyes, for he does not have the feeling for it. And for a long time I believed the Bambara to be endowed with an angelic nature.

189 All these beautiful thoughts have left me, and I must admit 831 that the Bambara are hideously degraded! Every day has made the matter clearer to me, for when I have left the mission to go to the surrounding villages, as the duties of my office oblige me to do several times a week, I have seen the same scenes again and again, heard the same songs and the same conversations, and I have found nothing very angelic in any of them. If I went into a field, I saw young men bent over their hoes, backs running with sweat, who got up and jumped, shouted the most raucous "you you," and made an obscene gesture. If a little girl, a child, came to give them a jug of cool water, she would get a coarse word as thanks and payment, and often, not to say almost always, a rough hand would remind her